

Animal-Proofing Your Home

Some animals that come into the backyard are fun and relaxing to watch, some are not. How many times have you had to clean up after raccoons, or been woken up by their drum solos? Rats and mice are dirty, unwanted guests. Skunks ... well, skunks are just smelly.

All these animals come into neighborhoods looking for food and shelter. To keep them away, animal-proof your house by **eliminating food sources and eliminating shelter** and access to your house. Also have a plan for getting rid of an animal that gets in your house.

Eliminate Food Sources

Pick up any **fruits or nuts** that drop from your trees. The dropped food is an easy buffet for raccoons and other prowling creatures. Keep your **garbage** in the garage, until garbage day. If that is not possible, get airtight garbage cans with lids. If you have some particularly clever raccoons, even these cans might not stop them. In that case, get a **rack in which to place the garbage cans** so that they cannot be turned over.

Tip: If the raccoons keep getting into your garbage, try adding one cup of **ammonia** to the garbage bag before you close it up. The smell drives raccoons away and keeps them from spreading the garbage all over. After a while they learn to not even open the garbage.

A compost heap can be food to many animals. You need to **keep the compost covered** with a heavy lid and avoid putting meats into it. **Pet food** is another source of food for wild animals. If your pet is an outdoor animal, try not to leave its food lying about. Feed it and when it is done take the food away.

Eliminate Shelter and Access to Your House

Make sure your house has no cracks or holes that lead outside. They could be on the roof, in the house or foundation. If you find these problems, just caulk or patch them. Vents in the attic are a common way for bats to get in. Just screen these vents off with insect screen.

Tip: Wait until dusk to patch any holes in the attic if you have bats. This way all the bats are out of your house and will not be able to get back in. The hole might be small; a bat can squeeze through a crack that is only 1/2 inch.

Protect window wells with plastic window well covers. This keeps animals and water out. Some animals are diggers so put screen under your deck or porch. You may have to embed it into the ground to keep raccoons and skunks from digging under a porch or deck. Dryer vents are another common point of access. Your local hardware store can sell you protected dryer vents, which are very easy to install.

It is also important to protect your chimney. Birds and animals find chimneys a perfect nesting area. To keep them out, install a chimney cap. You can purchase these at your local hardware store and they are easy to install.

Tip: To get birds and animals out of a chimney without hurting them, put a pan full of ammonia into the fireplace. Close the fireplace doors and open the flue. The smell of the ammonia goes up the chimney and after a short while the animals clear out. When you are sure they are gone, put on a chimney cap.

Getting Animals Out of House

Of course, even with your best efforts, occasionally animals do get in. In that case, **leave the animal alone**. Do not chase it around and do not try to pick it up yourself. Some animals carry disease and can bite through gloves. If you **give it room, it will probably leave** the way it came in.

Tip: If a bat is in your house, do not be afraid, bats rarely bite. **Open a window**, then close off the room from the rest of the house and **turn out the lights**. With the lights on, a bat seeks a dark place that is usually your furniture or curtains. The open window gives it a way out and eventually a bat leaves on its own. (Do not go chasing it with a baseball bat; it will not help.)

Some animals just will not leave. In that case you can try trapping the animal. There are wide varieties of live traps that do not kill the animal. All you have to do is bait them and wait. The bait you use depends on the animal.

- Peanut butter for chipmunks and squirrels
- Sardines for raccoons or opossums
- Tuna fish for skunks
- Corncobs for rabbits and woodchucks

If you catch the animal in the trap, transport it to some woods or take it to a wildlife agency. They can then release the animal. **Always wear gloves** when handling the trap or animal.

If you do not want to trap it yourself or you have trapped it but do not know what to do next, call animal control or a pest control agency.

Do-it-yourself pet repellants

Here are three useful repellents for dogs, cats, and other animals.

Powder

- Cayenne Pepper 1 oz.
- Powdered Mustard 1 1/2 oz.
- Flour 2 oz.
- Mix in a bag and sprinkle where desired.

Spray

- Crush moth balls and dissolve in naphtha mineral spirits, odorless paint thinner or similar solvent. Spray - keep away from flame.
- After the solvent evaporates, the mothball smell stays.
- **Note:** *This spray will stain fabrics, etc.*

For cats only

- Masking tape or double-faced tape put on surfaces with the sticky side up. Cats hate the feel and learn to stay away.

To keep the snakes away from your yard:

- Keep grass and vegetation cut short
- Remove debris piles, (branches, leaves boards, logs)
- Do **not** store fireplace logs (use natural gas instead)
- Seal off spacing under A/C unit slabs, landscaping rocks, etc.
- Seal area around A/C lines, electrical and plumbing going into the house.
- Cut low limbs (Keep three feet above the ground)
- Trim borders such as monkey grass along sidewalks and flower gardens to no more than 6 inches wide